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ABSTRACT

The metanarrative of modernity as constructed by language arts teaching in Malawian classrooms constructs an identity among Malawians that denies the multiplicity of influences, including the participation of Malawian and other African societies, in the narrative of the creation of school knowledge. It also perpetuates the marginality of indigenous paradigms of knowledge. This metanarrative can be traced back to the 19th century, when the earliest missionaries opened mission schools that combined Bible/Christian educators with English education. The paper discusses how contemporary Malawians' identity is negotiated through the educational paradigm of 19th century modernity and globalization, and is legitimized by the language arts curriculum, believing in the apolitical, ahistorical neutrality of global identity while perpetuating social marginality of learners and indigenous paradigms of knowledge production. The paper describes some of the historical processes that have shaped beliefs in the teaching of language arts in today's Malawian classrooms, and uses the dialectic of modernity as a framework for examining the institutionalization of the beliefs about knowledge creation and the resultant marginalization. It suggests reevaluating the perception of what the destinies of the people are. (Contains 22 notes and 22 references.) (Author/BT)

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Steve L. Sharra

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'The heart of alien conquest': Constructing modern-global identity and marginality through language arts in Malawian classrooms

By
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Abstract

The metanarrative of modernity as constructed by language arts teaching in Malawian classrooms constructs an identity amongst Malawians that denies the multiplicity of influences, including the participation of Malawian and other African societies, in the narrative of the creation of school knowledge, especially in the language arts. The metanarrative also perpetuates the marginality of indigenous paradigms of knowledge. This metanarrative can be traced back to the 19th century, when the earliest missionaries opened mission schools that combined Bible/Christian education with English education. This paper discusses how contemporary Malawians' identity is negotiated through the educational paradigm of 19th century modernity and globalization, and is legitimized by the language arts curriculum, believing in the apolitical, ahistorical neutrality of global identity while perpetuating social marginality of both learners and indigenous paradigms of knowledge production. The paper describes some of the historical processes that have shaped beliefs in the teaching of language arts in today's Malawian classrooms, and uses the dialectic of modernity as a framework for examining the institutionalization of the beliefs about knowledge creation, and the resultant marginalization.

> Eng. Lit., my sister,
> Was more than a cruel joke—
> It was the heart
> Of alien conquest.
>
> Felix Mnthali, 1998 'The Stranglehold of English Literature,' (*The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*)
>
> ---
>
> "Our folk were forcing us to go to school, not for their own sake, but for ours. They were trying to help us for our future, a future that would probably be better than theirs had been. They had never been given an opportunity to go to school themselves, but they knew that the knowledge of reading and writing and the ability to use such knowledge made quite a difference between a person who possessed such a knowledge, and the one who did not have it."
>
> Legson Kayira, 1965 (*I Will Try*)
>
> ---
>
> ". . .when a mythology perpetuates the idea that one group of people is superior, has been for centuries if not millennia, and that all others are thus in various ways inferior, as the ideas inherent in the rise of the West do, then the mythology does violence to others and should be abandoned."
>
> Robert B. Marks, 2002 (*The origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative*)

Introduction

Last September, I read on one of several Malawi email listservs, that a new shopping mall had opened in Blantyre, the commercial capital of Malawi.[1] The writer exclaimed: "We have now a shopping mall in Malawi. It was loaded to full capacity yesterday with every Malawian there pushing a trolley in one of the superettes. It seems we are getting there!!!!!!!!!!"[2]

For a nation that is described as one of the poorest in the world, daily life in Malawi is driven by the metanarrative that the country is headed toward a certain, known stage of modernization. The

[1] Blantyre, the Malawian city, was named after the Scottish town where Dr. David Livingstone came from. There have always been shopping malls in big Malawian cities, and it puzzles me as to why Shoprite, the new mall, should create the impression of being the first one ever.

[2] <malawinet@galaxy.malawi.net> www.malawi.net (Fri, 28 September, 2001)

standard bearers of this modernization are Britain, the US and other western countries, which are seen as having already "arrived."[3]

That the country is indeed poor is well established and in no doubt, if we go by fiscal and social indicators as published by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and other development agencies and non-governmental organizations. The government's and the people's daily struggle is therefore to march toward where the 'West' is perceived as being. While Malawi is indeed in dire straits and in desperate need of urgent solutions to the social and political problems plaguing the country now, the uncritical acceptance of the perception of some 'foreign model' of modernization to strive after engenders certain ways of thinking that do a lot to undermine the historical, cultural and traditional wherewithal of the Malawian and other African societies, crucial for generating a collective vitality needed to grapple with modern society's problems. The schools, and especially the teaching of language arts, have a lot to do with these perceptions, originating from the days of missionary education in the 19th century.

Mine is not so much an attempt to argue for the presence of an alternative modernity in the indigenous society, as a call for further research into how the language arts were introduced and taught during the early missionary days, and how that research might help deepen the examination of what is underappreciated and ignored in the fluidity and capacity of the ever evolving Malawian society. A brief study of the ideas expressed by educators and others since the earliest presence of missionary and secular education in the region[4] reveals some of the origins of this metanarrative of European, which is also considered global and universal, modernization. It also reveals that while many Westerners wrote about Malawi and other colonized regions in terms that depicted the countries as devoid of any modernity and civilization, others did believe in the agency, intelligence and vitality of the indigenous people.

In this paper, I want to argue that the idea of 'modernity' as expressed by the Malawian writing about the opening of a shopping mall in Blantyre, and several others, creates some problematic implications which result in the self-fulfilling prophecy of Malawi and other Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries being perceived as being on the extreme end of the modernization continuum.[5] Western countries are perceived, and promote the perception themselves, as being on

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[3] My perception is that the so-called 'developed world' has always presented itself as not just thus, but safely thus.

[4] I use the word region to mean the three countries that were referred to as British Central Africa, made up of present day Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which were then referred to as Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia, respectively. The three countries became the Central African Federation, as decision passed in 1951 and launched in 1953, see Landeg White, *Magomero*, p217 (1987)

[5] recent Malawian music repeatedly dwells on AIDS, government corruption, settling of political scores using trumped up charges and thuggery against members of the opposition, the ruling party's monopoly over the national radio, educational infrastructure in shambles, government hospitals having no drugs and

the opposite end of the continuum, having already accomplished modernity and solved all the problems human beings encounter in the modern world. It is therefore surprising to discover that some Westerners did express a belief in the validity of indigenous languages for the early years of schooling. I say surprising, because as far as the nation of Malawi has been independent, English has been the national language in education, politics and official business. It wasn't until 1994 that the government in Malawi announced a change in the policy to make indigenous languages the languages of instruction in the first four years of schooling, a situation which had actually previously existed several decades earlier, as we will shortly see.

It becomes imperative therefore for the structure of this discussion to start with some of the historical views about the place of local languages and the teaching of English in both the secular and missionary schools. We will then put these views in the modernization context they were debated in, pointing out that there has been little research done focusing specifically on the historical path that the teaching of the language arts has taken, to the present. The paper then addresses what has been called the unique presence of the Scottish Mission in Blantyre and in Livingstonia, northern Malawi. We will also briefly look at the place of Reverend John Chilembwe and his 1915 uprising in Malawian historiography, before closing the discussion with some of the curriculum and classroom implications resulting from the marginalization of indigenous paradigms of knowledge creation that, I argue, remain ignored at the country's peril insofar as the need for a change in perception over the way modernization is viewed in Malawi today. This change in perception is best captured in the description of the theory of the dialectic of modernity by John L. and Jean Comaroff in their 1997 book *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. More will be said about this dialectic in the concluding parts of the paper.

It is worth noting at this point what we mean by language arts instruction for purposes of this discussion. I am opting for a loose definition of the term, to encompass the teaching of English as a subject in Malawian schools, the insistence on English monolingualism rather than the bilingualism of English and another Malawian language at all the levels of the school system, and the preference for English literature, especially British English literature, in the schools. This loose definition allows us to contextualize much of the classroom practices done in the name of English and other languages. Tied to my discussion of these practices is also my surprise at the amount that has been written and published about Malawi in its historical and current contexts. There is a general perception that Malawi is largely unknown to the outside world, because not much has been written about it, whether by Malawians or non-Malawians, in English or otherwise. I meant for my historical study of the teaching of language arts in Malawi from the missionary times to be very brief, and even

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other basic equipment, unemployment, armed robbery and other crimes, a collapsing economy with runaway inflation, etc.

feared that I was not going to find very much. That has remained true for research on the teaching of the language arts, but not for the history of the geography, religion and politics of the country and the region. One does find an occasional mention of the teaching of language arts in these accounts, but they are there only as side remarks and not the central focus of such studies.[6] I have also discovered that for one to do a comprehensive study of the subject, one may have to spend considerable amounts of time in the National Archives of Malawi (surprise!), and in the Rhodes House Library at Oxford University. The library at Michigan State University is also worth mentioning, because that is where I have been tremendously surprised by the amount of research and publishing done on Malawi spanning several centuries. It is therefore quite curious that many these books and publications, and the ideas therein, remain unknown to and unexplored by the majority of Malawians, including the few educated elite.[7] A few of such ideas follow here below.

What modernization has meant in Malawian education from pre-independence days

Notwithstanding the fear that many of these publications are by Westerners holding beliefs that are today considered narrow and imperialistic, there is a healthy diversity enough to fuel educative discussion and further research, including, if not especially by, primary and secondary school teachers and students, on the history, culture and politics of the nation. Without this discussion and debate, the majority of Malawians remain caught up in the notion that theirs is an obscure, insignificant identity that has nowhere but Europe and America to look to for education and modernity.[8] Thus the impression created by the 1994 policy change in the language of school instruction, that many Malawians believed that this was the first time ever that such a policy was being introduced. But the historical literature indicates that it was not the first time, as we will see below.

In an inaugural lecture given in the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in August 1959, Norman Mackenzie, professor of English, told his audience that he had "a very strong prejudice in favour of vernacular languages for a child's first years at school." (Mackenzie, 1960). Professor Mackenzie said he would not like to see English replace local languages as the language of instruction at least the first three years of primary school. Actually, as policy, the use of local

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[6] K. Nyamayaro Mufuka's 1977 book *Missions and Politics in Malawi* has a revealing chapter (pp67-113) on the debate on English Education, which had a strong literary focus, he says. He writes that almost every official report between 1922 and 1959 mentioned this debate.

[7] This paper is written as part of a proposal for a dissertation research to investigate the nature of the narrative of modernity in the teaching of the language arts in Malawian schools, originating from the modernization aim of missionary education, and what this teaching and learning looks like today.

[8] I have met at least five Malawians living in the US, who stayed in a second country before coming to the US (South Africa, Ethiopia, for example), who claim citizenship in these countries, disowning their Malawian identity.

languages in the early years of school dated back to 1922 when the Phelps-Stokes commission advised it (Scanlon, 1964).

The commission had suggested that after the indigenous language in the early years, there be an African lingua franca in the middle years, and then a European language in the upper standards. The commission cited four elements to be considered in determining languages of instruction. The first one was that all people had an inherent right to their mother tongue, while the second warned that the multiplicity of languages should not mean misunderstanding and mistrust among otherwise friendly and cooperative people. The third element upheld the right of every group of people to be able to communicate directly with those to whom governance was entrusted, while the fourth provided for the acquisition, by "native people," of at least one of "the languages of civilized nations." (p69, 1922)

For Chinyanja, the language widely spoken in the then Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which today are Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, it was taught even up to the fifth year in schools run by a small 'unnamed' mission around Ntonda in central Malawi. (Greig, 1985)

Laudable as this may have been, even more self-fulfilling has been the belief that local languages are important only for the early years of school, leading to a chicken and egg dead end. There was obviously little writing and publishing done in local languages, and so it was difficult, if not impractical, to imagine the teaching and learning of more sophisticated forms of the languages. But then by limiting the study of the languages to the early years only, because of that reason, it meant that the languages themselves were deprived of the very depth and sophistication that were the reason for their not being taught at higher levels in the first place.

One of the reasons African languages were not taught beyond the first few years of elementary school, argues A.D. Wilshere (in G. Fortune, ed., 1964) was that missionaries who came to Africa had no linguistic training. With their background in the "Latinised" grammar of the English language, the missionaries failed to find any depth or sophistication in the African languages. They would "hear very well that Africans did not pronounce English properly," yet didn't recognize that they themselves sounded funny in their pronunciation of African words to the African ears. In Malawi, to date, it is still considered despicable and derisive for a Malawian to mispronounce English words, while completely respectable for a Westerner to mispronounce words in African languages. Thus English was presented and is still regarded as a superior language, a language of civilization, a language that had already "arrived," having run its full evolution course. English teachers, Professor Mackenzie had said in his inaugural address, had "inherited one of the greatest literatures in the world, a language which, in capable hands, can be stirring and infinitely expressive." (p31)

All this served to obscure the ongoing evolution English, like all languages, perpetually undergoes. As a language, it was only as recent as the 19th century that English could finally be taught

in universities, Wilshere has written. As of his writing in 1964, it was costing "millions of pounds" to teach British children a spelling system which Wilshere found to be "fantastically illogical." (p.6, 1964) Wilshere went on to say it was a basic requirement in any educational program to investigate the grammatical categories of its own language, and he personally believed that there was no fundamental difference between the teaching of "vernacular" languages and that of English. Quite a difficult thing to believe given the modernizing value English is perceived, by many Westerners and Malawians, to inherently possess. And these perceptions have persisted throughout the years in post-independent Malawi. The former president for life Dr. Kamuzu Banda addressed all his audiences, both Malawian and foreign, in English. When he built the elitist Kamuzu Academy, modeled after Britain's world famous Eton College, he decreed that no black person would teach at the school, which meant no local Malawian language, not even the national language Chichewa (renamed from Chinyanja), was ever taught there.[9] Yet back in the very Britain itself, it wasn't for everyone that English appeared such a foregone conclusion.

In 1947, wrote Professor Mackenzie, the British government issued an official pamphlet titled *The Battle for Output*, which the prime minister touted as "written in simple language. . .that the bulk of the people can read and understand." Yet upon investigation, very few people, and "almost none" of the women, for whom the pamphlet had been written understood even the basic outline of the document. "General literacy in England itself has a shorter history than most of us realize," said Professor Mackenzie in his inaugural speech. Despite that brief period that literacy has been a central force at the heart of the imperial and colonial project, its hold on the people has been firm. And the language arts, through literature and literacy education in both secular and mission schools, have been a formidable force in entrenching the belief in English as an agent of modernization and globalization. We next turn to a discussion of how the language arts were at the center of the education and modernization/globalization pursuit, through missionary work.

Missionary education and modernization/globalization

> When they first came
> They had the bible, we had the land
> We now have the bible and they have our land
>
> An African saying (from Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, 1975)

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[9] The Kamuzu Academy now hires Malawian teachers since the death of Dr. Banda in 1997. A friend of mine who was hired to teach Music told me about the stark differences in salaries between the Malawian teachers and their British counterparts. The school's headmaster remains British to this day.

'You see, the missionary came here and said, let us pray, and at the end of his prayer, we found the Bible in our hands, but lo, our land had gone.'

Mufuka, 1977, quoting N. Sithole, 1968

The Blantyre mission

The persistence of the narrative of modernity and progress toward Europeanization, used interchangeably with globalization in this paper, owes itself as much to the propagation of the Gospel due to its early arrival on the scene, as to the secular education which became formalized only in1926 with the establishment of the Department of Education[10], according to Greig (1985). Here we find a range of diverse views as to what the missionaries believed Africans were capable and not capable of. In his historical account of the Church of Scotland's Blantyre Mission, submitted as a PhD dissertation at the University of Edinburgh in the late 60s but only published in 1996, Andrew C. Ross describes Duff MacDonald and David Clement Scott as two of the early missionaries who believed in the capabilities of Africans. MacDonald came to Blantyre in 1878, and quickly learned one of the local languages, Yao, becoming a fluent speaker (Ross, p47). Duff was replaced by David Clement Scott who arrived in 1881. By the time he too left, in 1898, "he left behind a rapidly growing primary school system, an apprenticeship program, a growing literature in Yao and Nyanja, an efficient printing house, and, most important, a mushrooming African church." (p23) Here is how Ross describes Scott's views of the role of the Church:

> D.C. Scott saw the task of the missionary in Africa as both a bearer of the Gospel and of modern culture. This was how he interpreted Livingstone's dictum about the need for 'Christianity and Commerce' in Africa. The culture brought by the missionaries was not, he believed, simply European culture but a modern culture, world-wide in its significance. He insisted that Africans were its inheritors as much as Europeans. . .
>
> Scott held that since Africans were co-inheritors of modern culture it should be imparted consciously in the educational process, hoping that, as with the Gospel it would ground itself in African forms. (p63)

Scott was therefore angered, says Ross, by Henry Drummond's book *Tropical Africa* published in 1888 upon his return to the United Kingdom from a visit to the then Nyasaland. Though expressing some 'kindliness' toward Africans in the book, Scott found it unacceptable that Drummond denied Africans their shared humanity with Europeans, asserting in his book "the moral authority and superiority of the European over the African." However Ross makes it clear that no

[10] K. Nyamayaro Mufuka, (1977), gives 1925 as the year the Department of Education was established.

matter how much Scott believed in the equality between the two races, he still saw himself and the Church as having a civilizing mission for the Africans who were ready to take up responsibility for the church.

In his 1977 book *Missions and Politics in Malawi*, Nyamayaro Mufuka gives special prominence to the Scottish missionaries as playing a role unique to all the other missionaries in the region. He calls their views on imperialism 'radical,' and says their "appreciation of the African potential in economic and political affairs appeared treasonable to most of their European contemporaries in the colonial service." (p4) Mufuka writes that Dr. Robert Laws of the Livingstonia Mission in northern Malawi believed that Africans needed to be provided an English education up to the university level, so they could qualify for positions of responsibility in both the church and the state. It was, after all, a European-led world, and Africans needed to be equally competitive. One doesn't fail to notice the contradiction of the belief, held by people like David Clement Scott that Africans were equal partners who shared the same humanity with Europeans and co-inherited what was not necessarily European but modern culture, on the one hand. On the other was the view held by Dr. Laws, well-meaning and sympathetic to African aspirations, that the world was led by Europeans, and that Africans had a right to the highest education, no doubt believed to have been created and developed by Westerns. Not to suggest a narrow, dualistic view of things, but one wonders how Scott reconciled the belief in co-inheritance of modernity and a superior civilizing mission at the same time.[11] At least Dr. Laws was more or less certain about the leadership position of Europe in the world. And Christianity was part of that position. The colonial administration was however strongly opposed to an English education for the natives, fearing that educated Africans would turn around to "challenge the foundations of European superiority." (p75) The Phelps-Stokes commission had suggested that since few Europeans benefited from higher education, even fewer Africans would do so, and so a technical education was more suited to Africans, says Mufuka. Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee had argued for technical education for black Americans even much earlier in the 1890s, a position which drew criticism from fellow Negro activist W.E. B. DuBois, who saw Washington's point as accepting the alleged inferiority of the black person.

Another influential mission establishment in the then Nyasaland was in the north.

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[11] Unless one's articulate beliefs included the place of Africans in what was considered civilization and modernization, taking into consideration recent anthropological pronouncements that all modern humans originated in Africa; and that the pyramids and Egyptian civilization were built by people whose identity was unmistakable Africans (See the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and Martin Bernal, despite Bernal's self-confessed differences with Diop). David Clement Scott doesn't seem to have articulated any of these in his belief about the co-inheritance of modernity.

The Livingstonia Mission

The Livingstonia mission has been pivotal in educating a great number of Malawians who have ended up in positions of influence both in the post-independent government and abroad. One of the most important novelists to come out of Malawi, Legson Kayira, describes his strong yearning for the United States of America, where he eventually arrived after an incredibly arduous journey mostly by foot from Malawi to Kenya, and then by motor transport to Sudan, in his 1965 autobiography *I Will Try*.[12] Kayira had also read and been inspired by Booker T. Washington, but he makes no mention of W.E. B. DuBois.

Kayira is only one of many Malawians who, in one way or another, made a trip to the United States, and came back to play big political, religious or social roles. The first such notable name however is that of John Chilembwe. Although the numerous published accounts of Chilembwe and his place in Malawian historiography do not serve our purposes of tracing the historical influences of the teaching of the language arts, the story of Chilembwe is worth a brief detour. Chilembwe is credited with being the first Nyasa native to rise up in arms against the British, getting killed in the process, but having sowed the seeds of dissension that eventually bore the fruit of independence in 1964.

Chilembwe was born around 1871, according to George Shepperson and Thomas Price in their 1958 co-authored biography of Chilembwe, *Independent African*. Chilembwe started his career as a cook for the Baptist missionary Reverend Joseph Booth[13], who was himself considered radical and anti-colonial. Booth later took Chilembwe to the United States, where he studied theology at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, between 1897 and 1901. When he returned to Malawi as a pastor, Chilembwe started what became known as the Providence Industrial Mission (P.I.M.), and became a political activist continuing with the radicalism of Booth, who was deported in 1905. The Chilembwe Uprising of 1915, one of whose major grievances was the involvement of Africans in World War I, which he argued Africans had nothing to do with, has become the most researched and written about account of Malawian history.

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[12] Legson Kayira has published a number of novels in exile, starting with *I Will Try* published when Malawi was one year old as an independent nation. All of them were banned under Dr. Banda's dictatorship, and though the country now has a multiparty democracy, the statutes giving the government powers to ban or censor publications remain unrepealed. I first read *I Will Try* in 1998 when I was already here in the United States, and felt, at the time, that it was the most exciting book I had read up to that time. I could see so many parallels between Kayira's and my undying desire to come and study in the West. Now I can't make the same statement without lingering questions about the modernization complications the book renders itself to. But it still remains perhaps the most well-written book I have ever read.

[13] John McCracken has referred to Booth as a British missionary in his 1977 book Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940,

The former president Dr. Kamuzu Banda's life history also involved an epoch-making trip to the United States[14] where he, like John Chilembwe before him and Legson Kayira decades after him, obtained higher education. Again like Kayira, Kamuzu walked on foot from the then Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia, where he worked briefly. From there he moved on to South Africa, where according to John Lwanda,[15] he was accompanied by his uncle, the Reverend Hanock Nsokera. In South Africa the reverend was offered a scholarship to go and study in the United States, but the reverend declined the invitation and instead offered it to his nephew, citing old age. Banda went on to Indiana University where he stayed for two years before transferring to University of Chicago. There he finished a degree in philosophy and the classics according to his long time friend and his only authorized biographer, Dr. Don Brody of the state of Washington.[16] Kamuzu Banda then went to Meharry College in Tennessee, where he did a medical degree, before leaving for Scotland. By the time Dr. Banda returned to Malawi in 1958 upon the invitation of the local politicians to help in the struggle against the colonial administration, he had been away for 40 years, had practiced medicine in Scotland, London and Ghana, and was already advanced in years.

It remains apparent therefore, that these three of the most influential Malawians embodied some aspects of the spirit of modernization in the sense it is perceived in Malawi. All three came to the United States and stayed various lengths of time. There are many other Malawians whose sojourns in the West have meant watershed moments in the history of the country, whom this short paper can't go into without losing its focus on the notion of modernity as seen through the teaching of the language arts. But what is the specific importance of this notion to the Malawi of today? What is it that the idea of modernity has not taken into account? What does it mean for Malawians today to say they are living in a modern, global world? That's what we will turn to next, to consider some of the dialectics pronounced in those very early days, but not picked up by modern Malawians.

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[14] The official version, as read in Malawian schools, says Kamuzu was born in 1906, and was thirteen years old when he walked to the then Southern Rhodesia, making it around 1919. After his death in 1997, Kamuzu's relatives have given 1896 as the year of his birth. Dr. Don Brody, who is currently writing the only authorized biography of Dr. Banda, gives March-April 1898 <http://www.greatepicbooks.com/epics/february2000.html>.

[15] Like Dr. Banda himself, Dr. Lwanda is also a medical doctor, and shares with Kamuzu the distinction of being Fellows in the Edinburgh Royal College of Surgeons. The versatile Dr. Lwanda has written two historical books on Dr. Banda on the recent Malawian transition to multiparty politics.

[16] Dr. Brody has told me, in a telephone conversation, how he first met Dr. Banda on a train in London, and how Dr. Banda jokingly identified Don Brody as an American, from how he was dresses in stark contrast to Kamuzu's English gentleman's three piece suit. They became friends, and Dr. Brody later served Malawi in various capacities, including as Honorary Consul in the US, at the invitation of Dr. Banda.

'I was there when slowly darkness set in:' A fading dialectic of modernity: Chidammodzi, Jean and John L. Comaroff

I remember, Countrymen,
The days of "Dawn over the land".
Of hopes and expectations
When I truly understood
Slavery was a thing of the past-
We, the people of the land,
Had been freed.

Naomi Mnthali, *I remember*, in Rubadiri (ed), 1989

A major argument of this paper is that the narrative of modernity and modernization as seen through the teaching of the language arts from the missionary days to present day Malawi obscures important paradigms of knowledge at work throughout the history of the societies in the region, and distorts the national identity of Malawians.

One such obscured undercurrent has been the presence of an epistemology in the traditions and cultures of Malawi, which, argues H.F. Chidammodzi, a philosophy professor at the University of Malawi, have always had features of democracy inherent in them. If these democratic values in the traditions and cultures of Malawi are to remain unexplored, Dr. Chidammodzi warns that "the political players will continue to conceive of democracy as an imported system of social and political structures and values." Even worse, he adds, is the persistence of the "belief that the history of Malawian political values dates back only to the arrival of European nationals." (p93, in Chimombo M. [ed], 1999) This is the belief that helps fertilize and sustain the claim of Europe and America as the originators and icons of modernization, after which Malawi must aspire. The assertion made by David Clement Scott that modernization was not necessarily European, but a culture of modernity to which Africans were equal co-inheritors did not attract many adherents. Nor was the belief expressed by A.D. Wilshere that African languages possessed the same qualities of sophistication and depth for academic research that English was seen as possessing. In place of these important dialectics, modern Malawians have ended up with the conviction that modernization, Christianity, democracy and such other metanarratives have a teleological, known apex which has taken them to the present ultimate level of accomplishment.

It is indeed curious how such powerful dialectics could have taken root in the perceptions of Malawians of modern Malawi, when nothing was done to dig deep into the indigenous languages, cultures, traditions and history, both at the local and the continental level. "As a concept of

government," writes Chidammodzi, "democracy is inherent in human thought insofar as it embraces human welfare across race, time and geography. Thus it is possible to argue that an indigenous democratic system is capable of evolving from traditional styles of leadership." (p96) He goes on to point out several values that he suggests were adaptable to modern democracy, which were disrupted by the colonial practice to undermine the role of chiefs. The first of these values is the homogenous[17] ethnic states based on blood ties and mutual trust, considering people as rational, moral and active participants in the society. Second are the relatively fewer incidents of uprisings and revolutionaries, indicating the consent of the governed. Hereditary qualification and the demonstration of meritable performance is another traditional value that today has been replaced by appeasement of voters, bribery of office, nepotism, and empty rhetoric of false electioneering. (p99) There was also room for opposition, which was tolerated, as representation at the governance level, ensuring mass participation and majority decision making.

It was one thing for some of the Europeans to proclaim the gospel of superiority for their race and that of inferiority for the Africans. But it was another thing for the Africans to adopt the claims of modernity without exploring their own contributions to the solving of problems brought about by the fluid nature of culture, society and tradition. There is much to be said about the creativity and adapting capacity by the Africans of these structures which they domesticated, as have argued John and Jean Comaroff[18] for the South African encounter with colonialism. But present day beliefs in the claims of Western modernity by Malawians exist to the exclusion of any vitality and agency inherent in the culture, tradition and history of the nation.

Thus another obscured dialectic is the trade, commerce and social migration that have occurred over the entire region for thousands of years. The Mphunzi Hills in central Malawi have become famous archaeological sites for their rock paintings which have been described by Margaret Metcalfe, an anthropologist, as resembling the Egyptian hieroglyphics. (p60, 1956) She concludes that the paintings have nothing to do with the people living in the area today, entrenching the stereotype of genetic intellectual deficiency for Sub-Saharan Africans. The way modernization is described and viewed by Europeans, as teleological and accomplished, can be explained as one of the reasons why

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[17] See the note below. Chidammodzi might be arguing from the same perspective as the Comaroffs, but the Comaroffs appear to dismiss the idea of homogeneity in African societies.

[18] In their book *Of Revelation and Revolution: The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, John L. and Jean Comaroff argue that "[c]ontrary to the way in which 'non-Western' societies have been described in the scholarly and popular literatures of the West, these societies were never 'closed,' 'traditional' or unchanging. Nor were they founded simply on kinship, communalism, ascriptive status, partriarchy or any other such 'principles.' They tended, rather, to be complex, fluid social worlds, caught up in their own intricate dynamic and internal dialectics, the workings of which had a direct effect on the terms of the colonial encounter. It is an important part of my argument that the foreign perception of modernization obscures this fact, which I find key to revitalizing African agency through the teaching of the language arts.

one might see no connection between the different groups of people who had come and gone in the area, including the Akafula,[19] whose long history and wide geography spanned much of the continent, from southern Africa to Egypt. Oliver Ransford has made connections between the Akafula in Egypt during the times of the Pharaohs, to the Akafula at the time of Dr. David Livingstone in present day Malawi. He has described how Livingstone recorded stories narrated by the Akafula, handed down from generation to generation over two thousand years, that made specific references to the Pharaohs in Egypt. (pp12-13, 1966) One would expect this revelation to put to rest the controversy as to whether the Egyptians who gave the world the sophisticated architecture of the pyramids were of African identity or not. Even if there is no conclusive evidence about that, the history of the continent is long and the space expansive enough to accommodate extensive movements across generations, thus supporting the Comaroff's assertion that African societies were not just 'closed,' 'traditional' and unchanging. (p27) As we draw to the conclusion of this overview, the theory advanced by the Comaroffs is fundamental to understanding this fluidity, and to re-examining beliefs in curriculum and instruction:

> Colonialism was as such involved in making the metropole, and the identities and ideologies of colonizers, as it was in (re)making peripheries of and colonial subjects. In spite of the self-representation of Europeans at home and abroad— or the much invoked trope of the civilizing mission— it had little to do with the export, by a mature imperial society to benighted savages overseas, of highly cultivated practices and institutions. To the contrary, colonies were typically locales in the ways and means of modernity— themselves often insecure, precarious and contested— were subjected to experimentation and then reimported for domestic use. (p22)[20]

Beliefs and practices in language arts curriculum and instruction today

The current textbooks being used by students and teachers in Malawian primary schools were published in 1994, as a result of a curriculum review process that started at the beginning of the decade as part of a ten-year education development plan, 1985-1995. In a foreword to the teachers' guides and in the authors' statements to teachers using the guides, the adoption of English as the official language of the country is described as willful by the 'modern state of Malawi. . .with other countries in the world." (p.vi, 1994) One of the main objectives of the Malawi primary education system, states the guide, is "the acquisition of numeracy and literacy," and teachers "have an

[19] An ethnic group of Africans said to have been very short, average 4-5 feet, believed extinct now. Their connection with Egypt renders more weight to Cheikh Anta Diop's and Martin Bernal's research.
[20] What the Comaroffs are saying here is not related to Afrocentrism, which is frowned upon by many as merely replacing Eurocentrism and therefore no different in its implications.

especially important task in helping [. . .]pupils as they move towards becoming efficient users of English." (p.vii)

It is well and good that the importance of English in modern societies, of which Malawi is one, is recognized and enshrined into the goals of the educational system. That importance cannot be disputed. It is however very easy for this assumption to portray an apolitical, ahistorical rationale for the choice of English as the official language for education and communication. A good part of this paper has attempted to highlight the history, politics and beliefs that have contributed to the construction of the narrative of superiority of the English language and the accompanying ideology that has placed local languages, lived experiences and indigenous paradigms of knowledge creation on the margins of modernity and globalization. Such omission and suppression of the history and politicization of the power and ideology behind the decision to adopt English as the country's official language in school textbooks is part of the process by which Malawians construct an identity for themselves that claims to be modern and global while perpetuating Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge creation and marginalizing the contributions of Malawian, African and other societies to modernization and globalization. There are real implications for the unwarranted continuation of this Eurocentric narrative of modernization for not only Malawians but also other groups and societies in Africa and in the world. Robert B. Marks[21] argues in his new book due out for publication this month (March, 2002) that "our understandings of the past— who we are, where we came from, why we are here— inform our definitions of who we are in the present and have real implications and applicability for actions taken by us or in our name to shape the future." (p.7, 2002). Marks goes further to argue that our view of history, and of the present and of the future are contingent upon narratives and the real actions people, groups and institutions take based on the beliefs from those narratives. He posits that "the actions we take in the here and now do indeed have the possibility of changing the world . . .We are not trapped, but rather we [. . .] can have agency." (p.11)

This is where it becomes important that the curriculum and textbooks not only in Malawi but in other societies whose indigenous narratives have been marginalized by the Eurocentric metanarrative attempt to represent the multiplicities of historical, political and social contexts that are at play in the creation of knowledge and the practical consequences that result from the way knowledge creation is viewed and represented. Textbooks have the power to stand as the sole sources of validation of school knowledge especially in societies where school materials are difficult

[21] A number of scholars, including Robert B. Marks and Robert Young suggest that Eurocentrism has been around for only 200 years, before which the role played by non-Western societies in building civilization was unquestionable in the literature. See Martin Bernal for more scholarship on the role of different African societies, especially Egyptian, in contributing to world civilizations from ancient times, which was acknowledged in scholarly literature until the 1840s when Samuel George Morton, JC Nott and George. R. Gliddon wrote several paper and books disputing this, based on what Bernal argues to have been racist attitudes, their refusal to accept that Africans could have contributed substantially to world civilization.

to develop, as Denis Mbuyi states in his study 'Language and Texts in Africa.' (in Altbach & Kelly, p.167, 1988)[22] Malawi is one such country where textbooks play an authoritative role on what passes as valid school and world knowledge. We close this discussion with a call for more, careful studies of the role the teaching of the language arts plays in the construction of narratives about identity, modernization and globalization.

Conclusion

It is the above specific understanding that needs to be carefully studied and promoted so as to discard the old, insufficient paradigms of West-East, North-South. This is where the language arts in Malawian schools can play the role of changing the old perception of a modernization model claiming to be European, universal and global, and therefore devoid of any influences from the frontier of colonization or other parts of the world. This would entail a re-envisioning of teacher education in Malawi and in the region, a massive campaign to raise funds and make available to more Malawians the mammoth treasure of publications and debate pored and poured over the former British Central Africa, and specifically Malawi. The various views over the status of local languages, oral and published literature, and of English from the missionary times will need to be brought up for public and intellectual scrutiny. So should the narratives of modernization and globalizations, the place of early missionary and secular education, and the story of Chilembwe, which has to date been told more from the perspective of non-Malawians, albeit sympathetic and well-meaning, than from of Malawians.

This re-envisioning will also mean a concerted effort to trust the local people and their cultures to have stories and narratives that shed a new light onto who they are and what their aspirations are. It will mean re-examining the indigenous paradigms of knowledge creation that have remained suppressed and marginalized. It will mean re-evaluating the perception of what the destinies of the people are, and how to begin to seem to be "getting there" with a new narrative that is more representative and inclusive of the contributions of non-Western societies to modernization and globalization.

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[22] The issue of language as representative of culture and as part of the colonial agenda has been dealt with even more deeply by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* (1981, 1997) and *Decolonizing the Mind*, (1986), among others.

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